

Beyond the Pain

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Author's disclaimer: John, Aeryn, and the rest of Moya's crew are products and creations of Jim Henson Productions, Hallmark Entertainment and Nine Networks, and no copyright infringement is intended in any way. I would like to thank the writers, producers and actors for allowing me to play with their characters and I promise I'll put them back where I found them when I'm through.

This story takes place after A Bug's Life and contains many spoilers for that episode -- particularly the ending.

Thanks Kelly, for your wonderful help!

She became aware of her body in small stages.

Without moving, Aeryn took stock of the damage that had been inflicted on her. She felt the bandages tightly encircling her torso.

She felt -- actually felt -- the stitches pulling her traumatized flesh together. She sensed the beginnings of wound-fever and hoped that Zhaan's medicines would keep it at bay.

She knew what had happened... Larraq had stabbed her. Well, actually, it wasn't truly Larraq, although his had been the hand that wielded the foot-long blade. The intelligent virus had infected him and had subsequently dictated all his actions.

Aeryn remembered being locked in Larraq's less-than-loving embrace... remembered calling out to Crichton to do what he had to do, silently pleading with her eyes for him to do whatever was necessary to stop the virus. She remembered the virus whispering in her ear that Larraq had liked her... a lot. She saw the knife descend, but for a moment didn't feel anything. Then suddenly there was pain... excruciating... intense... overwhelming pain.

And time slowed.

Dimly, Aeryn was aware of John's horror-stricken eyes... of D'Argo's fury-filled voice. She didn't realize she'd been pushed until John's arms were cradling her pain-wracked body, breaking her fall and lowering her as gently as possible to the floor. Then D'Argo took command. She heard him order Crichton after Larraq... heard him call frantically for Zhaan... heard the anger and the fear in his voice.

Then... darkness.

She regained consciousness briefly when D'Argo lifted her from the floor. Zhaan must have performed some sort of triage there in the sub-passageway, for the pain had lessened somewhat. After that most of her memories were blurred... indistinct, but some were as bright as solar flares. Aeryn saw glistening drops of dark red blood standing out starkly against the blue of Zhaan's fingers. She heard Zhaan's muttered prayers to the Goddess. She felt the lurch of imminent starburst.

She heard a very small, tortured voice sobbing, "Where's Crichton? Where -- is -- John?" She had no idea who was crying, but the question was so pitiful... so plaintive... she felt sympathetic tears rise in her own eyes.

Then she knew nothing more. Arns must have passed before she woke again, heartsick, sore and filled with pain. Just as she'd taught herself early in her childhood to wake without movement, now -- without stirring or opening her eyes -- Aeryn gathered pertinent information. The bandage, the stitches, the fever... these were the details from her body. She extended her senses to investigate the space around her. She detected the slight hum that she associated with Moya. She noticed the slightly cooler draft of air moving across her forehead. She felt the familiar dent in the mattress. She was in her own quarters.

But she sensed that someone else was there too... sitting on the bench across from her bed.

It was Crichton... John.

Sitting there quietly... not fidgeting... not restless... as still as

Zhaan meditating.

John.

Aeryn tried to draw in a breath but her inhalation snagged on the pain and she couldn't stop a soft grunt from escaping her lips.

He lifted his head hopefully.

"Welcome back," he said softly. His voice didn't betray his exhaustion, but his eyes exposed his recent terror-filled imaginings. "You know for a while there, Zhaan wasn't too sure you were going to make it."

"What's happened to the virus?"

John shouldn't have been so surprised that she seemed to ignore his concern for her. After all, that was her style. Maybe one day he'd break through that impersonal shield she wore around her heart. Wasn't going to happen today, not with what he still had to tell her.

He locked his eyes on her face and answered, "It's dead."

Then he steeled himself to say something even harder.

"So's Larraq."

He said it simply, obviously wanting to shield her from the pain he knew he must inflict, but acknowledging her right to feel it. If she had troubled to look at him in that moment, he knew she would have seen the real regret he felt for Larraq's death plainly written there for the universe to see.

But she didn't look.

"He stabbed me didn't he?"

It was more a statement than a question.

Crichton wondered... had the tables been reversed... had Larraq been infected first and killed Lt. Hassan -- or Aeryn -- before passing the virus on to Crichton... had Larraq then been forced to kill John... would Larraq have felt as guilty about their deaths as John did? Probably. But if Larraq had been anything like Aeryn, you wouldn't have known how he felt just by looking at him.

"Yeah... you got lucky he missed your heart."

In the face of her pain it was all he could do to reign in his joy. She was alive! She would live to tease him and torment him... to teach him... possibly even to care for him?

His joy evaporated with her next words.

"Closer than you think," she said, still not looking at him.

John felt as if he'd been blindsided with a 2x4. He knew instinctively that she wasn't talking about the knife wound. Had he really been that close to losing her to Larraq? Then how on earth could he ever hope to adequately apologize for blowing Larraq into oblivion? She had so much to blame him for already. There was no way she'd be able to forgive him for thisâ€| for destroying yet another possible road back to a normal life.

She stretched gingerly and then finally turned to look at him. Thankfully the shock of her last words didn't show on his face -- or if it was visible she was politely ignoring it -- for she simply asked about the PeaceKeeper base.

Still struggling through her previous statement, John couldn't meet her eyes. The tears he'd held at bay for so long, threatened to overwhelm him. He had to concentrate to answer her.

"We're getting as far away from it as we can. It's still out there... we don't know why."

Unable to look at Aeryn for more than the briefest of moments, John gazed forlornly down at the rod he held in his hands. Anything to focus on besides her pain... anything to avoid seeing the actual moment she began to hate him in earnest.

Unaware that she was now gazing steadily at him, he lost himself in yet another examination of his role in this near-debacle. In this introspective state, he also didn't notice how motionless he was sitting. None of his usual unconscious gestures and mannerisms... he was absolutely still. It was as if the PeaceKeeper uniform he wore imparted some remnant of the training its former wearer had received.

"What are you doing in here, anyway?" she asked, her voice sounding slightly amused, apparently touched by his knight-errant attitude.

"Oh... I...I just wanted to... uhm... eh... uhm... the ... there..."

Aeryn interrupted gently, "Thank you."

John struggled again to maintain his composure. How could she thank him for ripping apart her dreams again? He knew that if he risked even a quick glance down at her, his tears would fall like rain. Gritting his teeth slightly, John answered, his voice not quite devoid of emotion, "Don't mention it."

If he had dared to look at Aeryn's face in that instant, he might have seen the restrained mirth lurking around her eyes and lips as she quietly replied, "Why would I ever mention it?"

Slowly John turned to look wonderingly at her. He almost couldn't believe his eyes or his ears. Had Aeryn actually cracked a joke? A small smile crossed his face as he realized she didn't blame him for anythingâ€| for everything that had gone so horribly wrong. She was going to be okay! Her heart would heal... just as her body would.

And together they would continue to stretch their emotional

boundaries beyond their differences... beyond their known universe
even... beyond the pain.

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THE END

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End
file.